

## 3. Signs

(See zoning ordinance [§78-202.7 Signs](#) (Administration), and [§78-508 Signs](#) (Development Standards))

*The Town of Herndon Zoning Ordinance User Guide series provides the public with general information on land use regulations affecting activities undertaken by the public and administered by the Herndon Department of Community Development. It is not intended to be a complete statement of all applicable regulations. Individuals are encouraged to contact the Department of Community Development at 703-787-7380 for complete permitting requirements.*

### What is the purpose of the Herndon sign regulations?

- To achieve a more desirable living environment;
- To ensure that signs are appropriate and adequate but not excessive;
- To avoid excessive competition among sign displays and dangerous distractions to motorists because of excessive competitive signage;
- To maximize the ability of permitted signs to provide identification and direction;
- To minimize the clutter and unsightliness of excessive signage.

No sign (unless exempt) shall be erected, repaired, altered, relocated, maintained or displayed in the Town prior to the approval of an Administrative Sign Approval or Sign Permit.

#### ***Please see attached:***

Table, "Signs Exempt from the Requirements of Obtaining an Administrative Sign Approval, a Sign Permit, or a Master Sign Plan"

Table, "Summary of Selected Sign Regulations"

### What is involved in Gaining Permission from the Town to Install a Sign?

**Step 1.** Determine the zoning for the property by consulting the Zoning Map or by contacting the Department of Community Development on (703) 787-7380. Please note:

- If the site is inside the Heritage Preservation Overlay District, a Certificate of Appropriateness must be issued by the Town. This will require a public hearing with the Heritage Preservation Review Board. It is best to discuss the proposal with the Town staff before submitting an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

- If the site is outside the Heritage Preservation Overlay District, a public hearing with the Architectural Review Board may be required.

**Step 2.** Determine which type of signs are allowed (i.e., wall mounted, monument, freestanding, etc.) in the zoning district by consulting the Zoning Ordinance, § 78-508, or by contacting the Department of Community Development.

**Step 3:** Decide on the type of sign desired: freestanding, wall sign, window sign, directory sign, motor vehicle fuel price sign, etc.

**Step 4.** Determine whether the desired sign is:

- prohibited within the Town;
- subject to the requirements of obtaining an Administrative Sign Approval or a Sign Permit; or
- exempt from the requirement to obtain approval from the Town.

**Step 5.** Determine the linear feet of building or tenant frontage adjacent or parallel to all open, improved public rights-of-way or public access easements.

**Step 6.** Determine the sign area allowed based on the type of sign proposed and the linear feet of frontage. In general, sign area is permitted at a ratio of one square foot of sign area to each linear foot of frontage, with certain maximums for certain types of signs.

**Step 7.** Check the Zoning Ordinance for information on exact sign heights and dimensions.

**Step 8.** Based on the information collected, prepare a concept design for the sign and review it with a planner in the Department of Community Development or with a professional sign designer and fabricator.

**Step 9.** Obtain a copy of the application form for the type of sign desired and

- Review the submittal requirements.
- Review the application deadlines for the respective public hearing dates.
- Prepare the application package and include all information and materials required by the Town.
- Call the Department of Community Development with any questions.

**Step 10.** Submit the application package before the application deadline. Applicants are encouraged to submit their application the week prior to the deadline to have their applications reviewed by Town staff for completeness. Applications received the week of the deadline and found to be incomplete will not be placed on the Board's upcoming

agenda. Meetings with staff prior to the submission deadline are encouraged and may be arranged by appointment.

Summary of Selected Sign Regulations					
			Without Master Sign Plan		With Master Sign Plan
		Residential¹	CS, CO, PD-B, O&LI, PD-W	CC, PD-D (Downtown), PD-TD	CC, CS, CO, O&LI,PD-W, PD-B, , PD-D, PD-TD
Wall Sign	Size	24 sf	one square foot per linear foot of building frontage, up to 150 sf per sign and 250 sf per building	one square foot per linear foot of building frontage, up to 50 sf per establishment	one square foot per linear foot of building frontage to include the length of any façade that contains a public entrance
	Max. Height	8 ft	20 ft if building is less than 35 ft in height	15 ft, or the sill of the second story window, whichever is lower, if building is less than 35 ft in height	same as without Master Sign Plan
	Illumination	indirect lighting only	yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	
Window Sign	Size	not permitted	Included in permitted wall sign area. Can be up to 25% of the aggregate window area, 25 square feet or 50 percent of a single window, whichever is less.	Up to 20% of the glass area where the sign is posted	included in allowed area of wall sign
	Max. Height		no restriction	20 ft	same as without Master Sign Plan
	Illumination		yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	
Projecting Sign	Size	same as for wall sign	same as for wall sign	10 sf, included in permitted wall sign area	same as for wall sign
	Max. Height			Minimum of 9 ft from sidewalk grade	
	Illumination				
Freestanding Sign	Size	24 sf	24 sf	24 sf²	not eligible for inclusion in Master Sign Plan
	Max. Height	8 ft for combined height of structure and sign; 6 ft for message content	12 ft for combined height of structure and sign; 8 ft for message content	8 ft for combined height of structure and sign	
	Illumination	indirect lighting only	yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	yes, as allowed at § 78-508.3(4)	
1/ Pertains to sign in residential zoning districts and for nonresidential uses in residential or planned development districts 2/Freestanding signs permitted on any parcel having a non-residential or multiple-family use in CC or PDD.					

## How can an applicant make sure the sign application and approval process goes as smoothly and quickly as possible?

Applications that follow all applicable zoning regulations and that meet all submittal requirements are likely to receive approval more quickly than applications that do not. Other suggestions for easing the review process for the applicant include:

- Set aside adequate time for preparation of the sign design, specifications, and the Town's application package.
- Meet with the Town staff prior to submitting the sign application.
- Plan at least one month for the Town's approval process.
- When submitting the application, make note of the dates and times of the work session and public hearing (if required) for the application; attendance at those meetings is encouraged.
- Study the staff report issued prior to the work session and be prepared to respond to all points in the staff report at the public hearing (if required).

## Informal Guidelines for Signs throughout the Town

- Master Sign Plans are recommended for non-residential development with two or more individual establishments. A Master Sign Plan allows more sign area and establishes a uniform façade and design detail plan for all window and wall signs within the development.
- Internally-lit, plastic faced, cabinet signs are discouraged. When they are used, however, opaque sign faces with translucent letters are preferred.
- If lighting is unavoidable, signs with indirect lighting, such as front lighting and down lighting, are recommended.
- Signs that reflect the building's architecture and style are encouraged.
- Building-mounted signs should be an integral part of a building's facade. The location, size, architectural style, and mounting of signs should conform to a building's architecture and not cover up or conflict with its prominent architectural features.
- Projecting or shingle signs hung from building facades are encouraged. These are oriented to people on sidewalks, not automobiles.
- Sculptural signs and signs incorporating artwork are encouraged.
- Ground mounted signs should feature a substantial base. Mounting supports should reflect the materials and design character of the building or site elements or both. Substantial landscaping around the base of monument or pedestal signs is encouraged and the

landscaping should be integrated with other landscaping and features on the site.

### Note:

Large lettering is not necessary for a sign to be readable. Letters 3-inches high can be read at 20 feet, and 6-inch letters can be read at 300 feet!

## Formal Guidelines for Signs in the Downtown Heritage Preservation Overlay District

In addition to the informal guidelines described above, signs in the Downtown are expected to follow these guidelines from Chapter 21 of the Herndon Heritage Preservation Handbook:

- Wall signs should be confined to the flat, unadorned surfaces of the façade and they should be placed where they best complement the building.
- Wall signs on commercial buildings should be placed no higher than the sill of the second story windows or fifteen feet from the sidewalk line, whichever is lower.
- A maximum of twelve inch high letters and symbols is recommended for wall signs and the overall height for the sign should not exceed eighteen inches.
- Average lettering height should not exceed six inches for window signs. Window signs should not be three dimensional.
- Window signs for upper floor tenants should not exceed two square feet.
- Traditional sign materials include wood, glass, gold leaf, raised individual metal or painted wood letters, and painted letters on wood, metal or glass. Plastic, black-lit signs are not appropriate in Downtown Herndon.
- The illumination of signs should be subtle and understated. Generally signs should be indirectly lit with a shielded incandescent light source.
- Any one sign should be limited to three colors.

<b>Signs Exempt from the Requirements of Obtaining an Administrative Sign Approval, a Sign Permit, or a Master Sign Plan</b>		
<b>Type of sign</b>	<b>Sign Size Limits</b>	<b>Other limitations</b>
Signs to display address numbers or for the direction or convenience of the public	Up to 2 square feet	No neon components allowed
Signs erected by public utilities indicating the location of underground facilities	Up to 1 square foot	
Freestanding signs or signs attached to fences warning against hunting, fishing, trespassing, dangerous animals, swimming prohibition, etc.	Up to 2 square feet	Should be placed approximately at eye level
Contractor's signs during construction	Up to 24 square feet	One sign per development, maximum height 7 feet above grade
Builder/developer community sales sign	Up to 24 square feet (both sides)	- One per development; - Maximum height of 7 feet above grade.
Real estate sales or lease for individual dwelling units	Up to 4 square feet	- Up to 12 months - One sign allowed
Real estate sales or lease for multi-family developments or businesses	Up to 24 square feet	- Up to 7 feet in height if freestanding; - One sign per street frontage.
Temporary window signs for commercial or industrial uses.	Covering up to 20 percent of the window area	Up to 30 days
Entrance and exit signs	Up to 1 square foot	Text limited to "entrance" or "exit"
Signs stating whether or not a business is open or closed	Up to 2 square feet	- One sign for each place of business; - Displayed no more than 8 feet above the first floor elevation; - Message content is limited to the word "open" if internally illuminated; - Voltage transformer hidden from view.
Political campaign signs on private property		N/A
Other noncommercial signs not otherwise specifically covered by Chapter 78 of the Herndon Town Code	Up to 9 square feet	- Not illuminated; - Placed no closer than 15 feet to the closest street; - Placed no closer than 5 feet to a side lot line; - Not higher than 6 feet above grade. - Kept in good condition; - Not affect traffic sight distance.
Changing message content on an approved sign for: a non-residential use in a residential district, a religious institution in any zoning district, a marquee sign		N/A
Signs erected by the duly constituted governing body including, but not limited to traffic control signs, signals, regulatory devices, legal announcements, historical markers and directional signs		N/A
National, state or local flags of other civic, charitable, educational or philanthropic groups which can in no way be construed as advertising and which are not otherwise prohibited by statute ordinance.		N/A
Seasonal displays or decorations, not advertising a product, service or entertainment		N/A

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## Need more information?

Have a question regarding required permits, the permit process, or application requirements? Call 703-787-7380 or e-mail [community.development@herndon-va.gov](mailto:community.development@herndon-va.gov) to make an appointment to see a member of the Department of Community Development.

Have a question regarding Building Permits or construction codes? Call 703-435-6850 or e-mail [buildinginspections@herndon-va.gov](mailto:buildinginspections@herndon-va.gov) to make an appointment to see the Building Official.

Visit the Planning/Zoning page on the Town's web site at [www.herndon-va.gov](http://www.herndon-va.gov) to view the Department of Community Development [web site](#) for the Zoning Ordinance User Guide series or to access the town code. Town offices are located at the Herndon Municipal Center at 777 Lynn Street, Herndon, Virginia, 20170.

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